



NAVY HISTORY MATTERS

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Compiled by Brent Hunt, Naval History and Heritage Command's Communication and Outreach Division

Welcome to Navy History Matters—our weekly compilation of articles, commentaries, and blogs related to history and heritage. Every week we'll gather the top-interest items from a variety of media and social media sources and then link you to related content at NHHC's website ([history.navy.mil](https://www.history.navy.mil)), your authoritative source for Navy history.

★ H-Gram 039

In his latest H-Gram, NHHC Director [Sam Cox](#) examines [World War II](#) events that took place 75 years ago to include the significant achievements of the [U.S. submarine force](#) in late 1944, and the worst [weather related incident](#) in U.S. Navy history—Typhoon Cobra—that sank three U.S. destroyers and killed about 790 crewmembers. In addition, Director Cox covers the first attack by Japanese *Kaiten* suicide torpedoes on U.S. shipping resulting in the loss of oiler [Mississinewa](#) in November 1944. Finally, the explosion of ammunition ship [Mount Hood](#) and the sinking of SS *Leopoldville* concludes this H-Gram. For more on these topics, [read H-Gram 039](#) at the [Director's Corner](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-96000/NH-96173.html>

★ Navy Museum Receives National Recognition

NHHC recently hosted a ceremony at the [National Museum of the U.S. Navy](#), on the [Washington Navy Yard](#), to honor the museum receiving its reaccreditation from the [American Alliance of Museums](#) (AAM). According to AAM, accreditation brings national recognition to a museum for its commitment to excellence, accountability, high professional standards, and continued institutional improvement. “When you think of accreditation you think of Smithsonian standard,” said Jeffrey Barta, assistant director for NHHC’s [Navy Museums](#) division. “NHHC is the Navy’s only history organization, and we are the keepers of the Navy’s [history](#) and [heritage](#). These museums are the property of the American people, and we want to make sure we are taking care of our priceless heritage assets using the best practices possible.” For more, [read the article](#) at NHHC’s website.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/news-and-events/news/2019/Navy-Museum-Receives-National-Recognition.html>

★ Acting SECNAV Names New Subs for Heroes of Pearl Harbor

On Dec. 23, Acting Secretary of the Navy [Thomas B. Modly](#) announced the Navy would name its newest [submarines](#) in honor of the heroes who lost their lives during the [Pearl Harbor attack](#). “I am honored and humbled to name the next two Virginia-class nuclear [fast-attack submarines](#) to be built as the USS *Oklahoma* (SSN-802) and the USS *Arizona* (SSN-803),” Modly said. “It is my fondest wish that the citizens of the great states of [Arizona](#) and [Oklahoma](#) will understand and celebrate our Navy’s desire to memorialize the 1,177 heroes who perished in [USS Arizona](#) (BB-39) and the 429 more in [USS Oklahoma](#) (BB-37) in Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941.” This will be the first time in more than three quarters of a century a Navy vessel will bear those hallowed names. Virginia-class SSNs are the most advanced submarine in the U.S. Navy’s inventory. They come equipped with advanced stealth, sophisticated surveillance, and [special warfare](#) enhancements. To learn more, [read the U.S. Navy release](#).



Photo Link: https://www.navy.mil/view_image.asp?id=304128&t=1

★ WWII@75: First African American Female WAVES Officers

On Dec. 26, 1944, 75 years ago, Harriet Ida Pickens and Frances F. Wills were commissioned as the first [African American](#) female officers. The two were highly accomplished women of New York City before joining the Navy. Pickens, daughter of one of the founders of the NAACP, was the executive secretary in the Harlem Tuberculosis and Health Committee that dealt with the city's most formidable public health challenges. Wills worked for several years in the employment department of the YMCA and elsewhere. On Nov. 13, 1944, both women were sworn into the Navy and sent immediately to join other candidates at the training station at Smith College in Northampton, MA. After five weeks, they earned their commission. Pickens would go on to organize and administer physical training to enlisted WAVES, and Wills was responsible for job training and selection for enlisted WAVES. For more, [read the essay](#) by COD's Adam Bisno at [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/us-people/w/willison-james-g/80-g-297441.html>

★ WWII@75: President Roosevelt Proposed Drafting Nurses

In his Jan. 6, 1945, State of the Union Address, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed drafting nurses into the U.S. military due to critical shortages during [World War II](#). The proposal was a recommendation by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson. The House of Representatives passed a draft nurse bill on March 7, 1945, but the Senate had not acted upon it before victory in Europe occurred on May 8, 1945. The War Department notified the Senate on May 24, 1945, that legislation would not be necessary since an adequate number of nurses had volunteered to meet the anticipated needs of the war in the Pacific. No further action was taken. For more on [women in the U.S. Navy](#) and [Navy medicine](#), go to [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-95000/NH-95144.html>

★ WWII@75: George F. Davis

On Jan. 6, 1945, [USS Walke](#) was attacked by four kamikazes while covering minesweeping operations in advance of the [Lingayen Gulf invasion](#). After the third plane struck the ship, burning gasoline enveloped the bridge and Cmdr. [George F. Davis](#), the commanding officer, was horribly burned. Remaining on his feet, Davis directed damage control efforts and saw the destruction of the fourth kamikaze plane. Assured of the ship's safety, he was taken down below where he died a short time later. For his heroic actions, Davis received the [Medal of Honor](#) posthumously. Davis would further be honored with [USS Davis](#) named in his honor.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/us-people/d/davis-george-f/nh-99875.html>

★ WWII@75: Formosa and Luzon

On Jan. 3, 1945, Task Force 38, under the command of Vice Adm. [John S. McCain](#), began operations against Japanese targets in the Formosa area, with [naval aviation](#) sinking six enemy ships. Their mission was to disrupt enemy communication facilities and destroy Japanese supply lines by sustained air strikes against enemy aircraft, airfields, ground installations, naval forces, and shipping. The [strikes](#) both "softened up" the enemy, which had begun weeks before, and it furnished support to the American landings of Jan. 9 on the shores of [Lingayen Gulf](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/80-G-431000/80-G-431079.html>

★ Abandoned Mining Town in Greenland Helped Win WWII

Scattered on a rocky shore in south Greenland, empty houses dot the shorelines of what was the world's largest reserve of naturally occurring cryolite. The town of Ivittuut (formerly Ivigtut) is now an abandoned mining town and popular sight for cruising Greenland, but during [World War II](#), it was a secret Allied location. Cryolite was mined there, then shipped to the U.S. where it was refined for use in the production of aluminum and ultimately fighter plane manufacturing. The mine reached its peak level of production in 1942 when 86,000 tons were shipped to the U.S. and Canada. The Navy strategically placed guns on the shoreline ready to shoot German submarines and there were about 500 U.S. Soldiers stationed on the island protecting the mines. It was so secret that no one was allowed to take pictures of the island or write letters home. In 1943, [SS Dorchester](#) was on its way to Ivittuut when German submarine U-223 torpedoed and sank the ship killing nearly 700. There is a large white anchor, on a hill, overlooking the town, acting as a memorial for those who were lost. For more, [read the article](#) in *Smithsonian Magazine*.



Photo Link: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/how-abandoned-mining-town-greenland-helped-win-world-war-ii-180973835/>

★ NHHC Webpage of the Week

This week's Webpage of the Week is a new entry on NHHC's [DANFS](#) index. Named in honor of Pharmacist's Mate Third Class [Jack Williams](#), who received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions during the [Battle of Iwo Jima](#), [USS Jack Williams](#) was commissioned on Sept. 19, 1981. On the morning of Oct. 23, 1983, in [Beirut, Lebanon](#), terrorists driving two trucks laden with explosives struck separate buildings housing U.S. Marines and French forces killing nearly 300 American and French servicemembers, mostly U.S. Marines. *Jack Williams* was stationed off Beirut when the terrorists attacked. The ship sent a team ashore to help aid in rescue and clean-up operations, then remained on the gun line until relieved on Nov. 4. During the ship's active service, *Jack Williams* participated in multiple training exercises, counter-narcotics operations, and maritime interception actions. NHHC Guy Nasuti wrote the ship's history for this new DANFS entry. Check it out today.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/dn-series/dn-sc-83-06743-uss-jack-williams--ffg-24-.html>

★ Today in Naval History

On Dec. 31, 1941, Adm. [Chester W. Nimitz](#) assumed command of the U.S. Pacific Fleet relieving Adm. [Husband E. Kimmel](#). Nimitz was serving as Chief of Bureau of Navigation when the [Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor](#). Nimitz is credited with restoring morale in the wake of the attacks by building an aggressive combat team and instinctively making the right decisions in the [Battle of Midway](#)—the battle that altered the course of [World War II](#). In December 1944, Nimitz was promoted to Fleet Admiral (five-stars), and on Sept. 2, 1945, was onboard [USS Missouri](#) for the [surrender of the Japanese](#). A few weeks after the war, Nimitz relinquished command of the Pacific Fleet and was appointed the tenth [Chief of Naval Operations](#). During his tenure as CNO, he oversaw more than two million American servicemembers return home, supervised the reduction of the post war Navy, and dealt with the beginnings of the Cold War. After leaving the Navy, he was extremely active in educational, cultural, and community affairs. Nimitz died at his quarters—Yerba Buena Island, San Francisco, CA—on Feb. 20, 1966. He is buried in the Golden Gate National Cemetery.



For more dates in naval history, including your selected span of dates, see [Year at a Glance](#) at [NHHC's website](#). Be sure to check this page regularly, as content is updated frequently.

Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/art/exhibits/communities/100th-anniversary-cno/fleet-admiral-chester-w--nimitz/fleet-admiral-chester-w--nimitz.html>